

JOB CHARACTERISTICS AS ANTECEDENTS OF MEANINGFUL WORK AMONG LECTURERS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NORTH-WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the predictive influence of job characteristics on meaningful work among lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria and examined whether gender differences exist in lecturers' perception of meaningful work. Anchored on the Job Characteristics Model, the study adopted a quantitative correlational survey design. A sample of 382 lecturers was selected using proportionate sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires measuring five dimensions of job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback and a Uni-dimensional meaningful work scale. Instrument validity was established through expert review, while reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Data was analyzed using multiple regression analysis and independent samples t-test at the .05 level of significance. Results indicated that job characteristics jointly and significantly predicted meaningful work, with autonomy emerging as the strongest predictor. The findings further revealed no significant gender difference in lecturers' perception of meaningful work. The study concludes that meaningful work among lecturers is primarily influenced by job design rather than demographic characteristics. It recommends institutional policies that strengthen autonomy-supportive work environments and inclusive organizational practices to enhance lecturers' meaningful work experiences.

Keywords: job characteristics, meaningful work, autonomy, gender differences, colleges of education.

Introduction

The contemporary workplace has increasingly shifted from an emphasis on economic productivity toward understanding employees' psychological experiences and the meaning they derive from work. Within organisational behaviour scholarship, researchers now recognised that the design of work itself plays a critical role in shaping motivation, engagement, and well-being. One of the most influential frameworks explaining this relationship is the Job Characteristics Model, which posits that specific job attributes generate psychological states that influence employees' internal work motivation and attitudes (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The model identifies skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback as core dimensions capable of fostering experienced meaningfulness of work.

Over the past decade, organisational scholars have extended job design research beyond performance outcomes to include psychological and existential experiences at work. Contemporary studies demonstrate that job characteristics influence employees' thriving, creativity, and psychological functioning by shaping how individuals interpret their roles within organisational systems (Farid et al., 2023). Recent organisational psychology evidence further shows that psychosocial job characteristics remain central predictors of employee well-being across evolving work arrangements, including hybrid and post-pandemic work environments (Picker-Roesch et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the enduring relevance of job design as a foundational mechanism through which employees experience work positively.

Parallel to developments in job design research is the growing scholarly interest in meaningful work, a construct describing employees' perception that their work possesses purpose, significance, and personal value. Meaningful work has become a central theme in organisational behaviour because employees increasingly seek fulfillment and identity expression through work rather than solely financial rewards. Systematic reviews indicate that meaningful work is associated with enhanced engagement, motivation, and psychological resilience across occupations (Tan et al., 2023). More recent meta-analytic evidence also suggests that meaningful work emerges from an interaction between personal resources and structural job conditions, highlighting the importance of organisational context in shaping meaning experiences (Jiang & Hirsh, 2025).

Globally, higher education institutions have become particularly important contexts for examining meaningful work because academic roles inherently involve knowledge creation, societal contribution, and human development. Lecturers are expected to influence future generations while simultaneously meeting institutional demands for research productivity, teaching effectiveness, and administrative responsibilities. Recent higher education research indicates that increasing workload pressures, institutional competition, and changing pedagogical expectations are reshaping lecturers' psychological experiences of work, raising concerns about sustained motivation and professional fulfillment (He et al., 2026). Similarly, studies on lecturers' innovative behaviour emphasised that intrinsic motivation and psychological engagement are essential drivers of effectiveness in academic environments (Yeap & Shanmugam, 2026).

Despite the presumed meaningful nature of academic work, evidence suggests that meaningfulness is not automatically guaranteed by professional status alone. Scholars argue that employees experience work as meaningful primarily when job structures provide autonomy, clear task significance, and developmental opportunities rather than merely occupational prestige (Lozovetska et al., 2024). Consequently, understanding meaningful work requires examining how jobs are designed rather than assuming meaning as an inherent feature of professions such as teaching.

Within developing countries, particularly Nigeria, tertiary education institutions face structural and organisational challenges including resource constraints, expanding enrolment, administrative centralisation, and performance pressures. While Nigerian organisational studies have examined job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and occupational stress among academic staff, relatively little attention has been paid to how job

characteristics shape lecturers' psychological experiences of meaningful work. This represents a critical oversight because organisational interventions often target outcomes without addressing underlying job design mechanisms responsible for those outcomes.

The persistence of motivational challenges among lecturers, including declining engagement and professional dissatisfaction reported across higher education discourse, suggests that structural features of academic roles may not sufficiently support psychological meaningfulness. When lecturers perceive limited autonomy, fragmented task identity, or inadequate performance feedback, the experience of meaningful work may diminish despite the socially significant nature of teaching. Yet empirical evidence explaining this relationship within Nigerian Colleges of Education remains scarce. Consequently, institutional reforms may lack theoretically grounded insights into how work design influences lecturers' motivation and professional fulfillment.

A review of contemporary literature reveals several important gaps. First, although the Job Characteristics Model has been extensively validated in Western organisational settings, its application within African higher education contexts remains limited. Second, recent meaningful work scholarship increasingly emphasises antecedents of meaning, yet empirical studies integrating job characteristics as predictors of meaningful work are still relatively few, particularly in educational institutions. Third, Nigerian research has largely examined lecturer outcomes such as satisfaction and performance without investigating psychological meaningfulness as a central explanatory mechanism. Finally, Colleges of Education institutions responsible for training future teachers remain underrepresented in organisational behaviour research despite their strategic importance in national development. These gaps indicate a need for empirical investigation examining whether job characteristics function as antecedents of meaningful work among lecturers within the Nigerian context. Addressing this gap not only extends job design theory into an under researched cultural and institutional environment but also provides evidence capable of informing organisational policies aimed at enhancing lecturer motivation, well-being, and effectiveness. Therefore, this study investigates job characteristics as antecedents of meaningful work among lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria, contributing to both organisational behaviour theory and higher education management practice.

Job Characteristics

In organizational behaviour, job characteristics refer to the fundamental attributes of work that shape how employees experience and respond to their roles. These characteristics influence key outcomes such as work engagement, intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and performance by affecting employees' psychological experiences of meaningfulness, responsibility, and feedback about results (Cotič et al., 2025; research on job characteristics theory). The widely recognized framework identifies five core dimensions skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—which together determine the motivational potential of a job and its capacity to enrich the work experience of employees (Cotič et al., 2025).

Meaningful work

Meaningful work refers to work that individuals perceive as personally significant, valuable, and worthwhile in relation to their own beliefs, values, and life goals. It is a subjective psychological experience where a person feels that their job has purpose and significance

beyond mere economic reward, often involving contributions to personal growth, societal good, or fulfillment of deeper values (Lysova et al., 2025; Stepanek & Paul, 2023; Albrecht et al., 2021). In organizational research, meaningful work is frequently described as work that employees experience as significant and positive in value, such that the work matters to them and aligns with their sense of identity and purpose (Stepanek & Paul, 2023; Albrecht et al., 2021). Moreover, this perception of meaningfulness is linked to motivation, engagement, and psychological well-being, highlighting its importance in both individual and organizational outcomes (Blustein, 2023; Stepanek & Paul, 2023).

Job Characteristics and Meaningful Work

In organisational behaviour, job characteristics refer to the design features of work that influence how employees cognitively and emotionally experience their roles. According to Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), work enriched with certain core features skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback can enhance psychological states such as experienced meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of results (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Of these, experienced meaningfulness of work is theorised as the employee's sense that their work is significant, purposeful, and valuable, and it plays a central mediating role between job design and outcomes such as motivation and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Lysova et al., 2025).

Empirical research consistently demonstrates positive relationships between job characteristics and meaningful work. For example, Allan, Duffy, Wilson, and McClain (2017) found that perceived task significance was a longitudinal predictor of meaningful work among employees, suggesting that when individuals see their work as impactful, they are more likely to experience it as meaningful over time. This finding supports a foundational assumption of JCT that task significance promotes psychological meaningfulness. Similarly, Albrecht, Green, and Marty (2021) reported that job autonomy and job variety dimensions closely aligned with autonomy and skill variety were significantly associated with employees' reports of meaningful work, and these associations helped explain variance in employee engagement. Their study highlights that job features facilitating control over one's work and diverse task demands are conducive to meaningful experiences at work. In research with digital platform workers, Cho and Jung (2025) also found a positive correlation between job autonomy and meaningfulness of work, though the effect was modest and mediated by self-efficacy, indicating that job characteristics may interact with individual psychological resources in shaping meaningfulness.

Despite strong positive evidence, the relationship between job characteristics and meaningful work is not universally uniform. Some studies point to contextual and individual moderating factors. For instance, Cho and Jung's (2025) findings imply that autonomy may contribute to meaningful work most strongly when employees possess high self-efficacy. Similarly, research on job crafting suggests that employees who proactively adjust their job boundaries may experience higher meaningfulness independent of formal job design, indicating that meaning emerges from both structural job features and personal agency. Moreover, broader wellbeing research has found that while enriched job characteristics often link to positive work attitudes (like satisfaction and engagement), their associations with general psychological outcomes (such as stress or depression) can be weaker or non-significant,

underscoring that the job design meaningful work connection may be strongest within the domain of work attitudes rather than global wellbeing.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative correlational survey design to examine the predictive relationship between job characteristics and meaningful work and to determine differences in meaningful work across gender groups. The design was appropriate because it enabled the assessment of relationships among naturally occurring variables without experimental manipulation. The target population comprised lecturers in Colleges of Education located in North-West Nigeria. A total of 382 lecturers participated in the study. Participants were selected using proportionate sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation across institutions and gender categories. Job characteristics were measured using a structured questionnaire assessing five dimensions: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Each dimension consisted of four items rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Meaningful work was assessed using a six-item unidimensional scale measuring lecturers' perceived sense of purpose and value derived from their work roles. Content and face validity of the instruments were established through expert evaluation in Educational Management and Tests and Measurement. Internal consistency reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all of which met the acceptable threshold of .70 for research instruments. Questionnaires were administered directly to respondents with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and completed instruments were retrieved immediately after administration. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the joint and relative contributions of job characteristics to meaningful work, while an independent samples t-test examined gender differences. Statistical decisions were made at the .05 level of significance.

Data Analysis

Multiple regression analysis and independent sample t-test were used to analyse the data collected from the respondents. The former was used to examine how job characteristics (independent variables) influences lecturers' meaningful work (dependent variable) while the later was used to determine gender differences of lecturers' meaningful work in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria . SPSS version 20.0 was employed to analyse the data collected.

Result of the Study

Table 1: Multiple regressions on the Joint Perceived Predictive Influence of Job Characteristics on Meaningful Work among Lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria

	R=.449 ^a		
	R ² =.202		
	Adjusted R ² =.191		
	SEE=1.20892		
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square F
Sig			

Regression	138.714	5	27.743	18.983
.000 ^b				
Residual	549.519	376	1.461	
Total	688.233	381		

Table 1 shown the result of multiple regression analysis conducted to examine the joint predictive influence of job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) on meaningful work among lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria. The regression analysis indicated a moderate relationship between job characteristics and meaningful work $F(5, 376) = 18.98$, $p < .001$, $R = .449$. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .202$) revealed that the predictor variables jointly explained 20.2% of the variance in meaningful work among lecturers. The adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjusted $R^2 = .191$) shows that after adjusting for sampling error, approximately 19.1% of the variability in meaningful work was accounted for by the combined influence of the job characteristics variables. The standard error of estimate (SEE = 1.20892) indicates a relatively small prediction error, suggesting reasonable model accuracy.

Table 2: Test of Significance of Regression Coefficient Variable

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients				Standardised Coefficients	
	Beta	Std. Error	β	t-value	Sign	
Constant	19.176	.612	31.324	.000		
Skill Variety		.022	.083	.044	.259	.796
Task Identity		-.188	.093			-.344
					-2.031	.043
Task Significance		-.022	.091			-.038
				-.239	.811	
Autonomy		.513	.059			.691
				8.755	.000	
Feedback		-.049	.061			-.099
		-.811	.418			

Table 2, presents the test of significance of regression coefficient variables results, it showed that the regression model was statistically significant. This implies that the set of job characteristics variables significantly predicted meaningful work among lecturers. Therefore, the overall regression model provides a better prediction of meaningful work than using the mean alone. The standardized beta coefficients were examined to determine the relative contribution of each predictor variable.

The result explain that skill variety did not significantly predict meaningful work ($\beta = .044$, $t = 0.259$, $p = .796$). This indicates that variation in skills required for the job does not significantly influence lecturers' perception of meaningful work. On the other hand, the result showed that task identity significantly predicted meaningful work but showed a negative relationship ($\beta = -.344$, $t = -2.031$, $p = .043$). This suggests that increases in task identity were associated with a decrease in perceived meaningful work among lecturers. Furthermore, task significance was not a significant predictor of meaningful work ($\beta = -.038$, $t = -0.239$, $p = .811$). Thus, perceived importance of job tasks did not significantly contribute to meaningful work in this model. Contrarily, autonomy emerged as the strongest positive predictor of

meaningful work ($\beta = .691$, $t = 8.755$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that increased freedom and independence in job performance significantly enhance lecturers' sense of meaningful work. Lastly, the finding revealed that feedback did not significantly predict meaningful work ($\beta = -.099$, $t = -0.811$, $p = .418$). Hence, information received about job performance was not a significant determinant of meaningful work among the respondents.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test on Predictive Gender Differences of Lecturers' Meaningful Work in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	274	23.4088	1.41708	-0.78	0.436	Retain
Female	108	23.5278	1.13942			

This section of the study examined whether gender differences exist in lecturers' perception of meaningful work in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria using an independent samples t-test. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female lecturers in their perception of meaningful work. The analysis showed that male lecturers ($M = 23.41$, $SD = 1.42$, $n = 274$) and female lecturers ($M = 23.53$, $SD = 1.14$, $n = 108$) reported closely similar levels of meaningful work. The independent samples t-test result revealed that the difference was not statistically significant, $t(380) = -0.78$, $p = .436$. Since the obtained p-value is greater than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was retained, indicating that gender does not significantly influence lecturers' experience of meaningful work.

The absence of gender difference suggests that meaningful work among lecturers is largely shaped by professional and organizational factors rather than demographic characteristics such as gender. This finding implies that both male and female lecturers experience comparable levels of purpose, value, and significance in their academic roles within Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The primary objective of the study was to examine the influence of job characteristics on meaningful work among lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-West, Nigeria. Two research hypotheses were raised to guide the study. These hypotheses are:

H₀₁ Job characteristics jointly have no significant influence on meaningful work among lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria.

H₀₂ There is no gender differences on meaningful work among lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria.

The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that job characteristics jointly and significantly influence meaningful work among lecturers. The model explained 20.2% of the variance in meaningful work, indicating that characteristics embedded within the design of academic jobs contributes meaningfully to lecturers' perception of work significance and purpose. Empirically, the outcome of the study aligns with prior findings of Allan et al. (2019)

and Lysova et al. (2019) who at different studies and location found that job characteristics collectively enhance meaningful work and positive work outcomes. On the other hand, the findings indicated that skill variety did not significantly predict meaningful work among lecturers. The outcome agrees with the findings of Humphrey et al., 2007 who at different setting and study found that employees' excessive skill variety demands has no significant relationship with meaningful work. This suggests that the use of multiple skills in teaching, research, and administrative duties does not necessarily translate into a stronger perception of meaningful work within the studied institutions. However, the finding contradicts the findings of Hackman and Oldham (1976) who in their studies found that skill variety influenced meaningful.

Similarly, the study established that task identity significantly predicted meaningful work but demonstrated a negative relationship, the outcome support the finding of Parker, (2014) who at differing location and studies found a negative relationship between task identity and meaningful work. Furthermore, the study established that task significance did not significantly predict meaningful work, the outcome contradict the finding of Allan et al., (2019) who at different location and study reported positive associations between task significance and meaningful work. More so, the study found autonomy as the strongest and most significant positive predictor of meaningful work. This indicates that lecturers who experience freedom, independence, and discretion in teaching and academic decision-making are more likely to perceive their work as meaningful. The result align with the findings of Lysova et al. (2019); and Allan et al. (2019) who different studies and location reported autonomy as a consistent predictor of meaningful work and work engagement. Lastly, the study established that feedback did not significantly predict meaningful work among lecturers. The outcome agrees with the finding of Humphrey et al., (2007) who found a weaker relationship between feedback and meaningful work.

On the other hand, the study further reported no significant gender differences in meaningful work among the lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria. The finding aligns with findings of Allan et al. (2019), Steger et al. (2012) and Lysova et al. (2019) who at different studies and settings reported that gender does not significantly determine employees' perception on meaningful work. However, the result contrasts with the finding of Rosso et al. (2010) who at different study and location found that gender significantly influences meaningful work associating his findings to workplace experience due to societal expectations, or work and family role conflicts.

Conclusion

Overall, the study confirms that job characteristics significantly influence meaningful work among lecturers, although the strength and direction of individual predictors vary within contextual realities. Autonomy remains the most critical determinant, while other job dimensions operate differently due to institutional and environmental factors within Nigerian Colleges of Education. The findings therefore extend the Job Characteristics Model by demonstrating that contextual and organizational conditions shape how job design translates into meaningful work in higher education settings. Similarly, the independent samples t-test revealed no significant gender difference in lecturers' perception of meaningful work in Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria. The finding suggests that meaningful work is a universal professional experience shaped primarily by organizational and job-related factors

rather than gender. This outcome reinforces existing empirical evidence that emphasizes the role of job characteristics and workplace context in fostering meaningful work experiences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Colleges of Education in North-West Nigeria should strengthen meaningful work among lecturers by improving job design through increased professional autonomy and well-coordinated academic responsibilities, as these organizational factors significantly enhance lecturers' work engagement and sense of purpose.
2. Institutional efforts to promote meaningful work should be implemented uniformly for all lecturers without gender-based differentiation, since meaningful work perceptions are influenced primarily by workplace conditions rather than gender differences.

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